

THE NORTH GARRET.

BY CLARA MERWIN.

I AM an old bachelor. If there is a human being whose nerves are made of steel, I am that individual. I have never once lost my presence of mind. I have saved my life and that of others by knowing just what to do in sudden emergencies. I don't believe in ghosts of course. I'm not a sentimental person; I have never been in love.

Once, when I was five-and-twenty—no matter how many years ago—I thought that I was. A pair of brown eyes, long golden hair, and dark lashes, put the notion into my head. I lost my usual good-sense for awhile and proposed to Milly Bashwood, and went through the usual experiences that follow an acceptance. But I grew tired of my pretty toy in a few months, and began to see that "a young man married" would be "a young man marred"; the girls had lost all interest in me, and the married ladies took to snubbing me. I had not half the nice invitations I used to have; and, besides, old Mr. Bashwood failed, and Milly's fifty thousand dollars vanished into thin air. She would have nothing, instead of being an heiress; so, one day, I told her we had both made a mistake, and she said probably I was the best judge, and gave me back my ring. It had a diamond in it, and I had it set for a shirt-stud.

Of course, I returned her letters, and she mine. After that, we never met again, and I forgot all about her in a few years. I stand before you a practical man, untrammelled by any sort of superstition, with a good income, good health, and a habit of enjoying my life—an example to all sentimental emotional people, if I say it myself; and, just in this condition, I walked in at the door of Mrs. Regan's little old cottage, at half-past ten, on the twenty-sixth of July, 1873.

We had started for the Mountain House, Barnard and I; our trap broke down, and there we were, on a rough road, with our journey not half over, Catskill as far behind us as the Mountain House was before us, both of us as hungry as hunters, both of us dead-tired.

"We can't go on," said Barnard.

"We can't go back," said I.

Then over the stone fence popped a sunbonnet, and someone cried:

(160)

"Your wheel has come off, hasn't it?"

And, on my answering that it had, and that I should like to know what we were going to do that night, the sunbonnet replied:

"Why, do tell! To be sure! Well, now—and everybody is chock-full of summer boarders, and so be I! But I guess I can figger it, if I do a little head-work: I'll put them Jackson boys to sleep with our Sam, and I'll make the help go onto the settee, and one of you shall have the kitchen-chamber, and one the north garret. And my old man, he's a wheelwright by trade—will jigger your wheel for you in three shakes of a sheep's tail."

We were only too glad to accept.

"Dollar a day," said she. "Cheap enough." Such a supper! But starvation does not discriminate—I ate heartily. And, afterward, being asked to choose between the kitchen-chamber and the north garret, I said the garret.

It was a queer-looking place, with a chimney in the centre, the roof running from a peak in the middle to the floor on either side. One square window and one sloping one, and boxes, bags, and suspended dresses adorned it. The bed was apparently stuffed with corncocks.

"When one sleeps, one forgets one's bed," said I. "Let me sleep."

I have since learned from an almanac that the moon rose, that night, about one o'clock; therefore, it must have been about one o'clock that I woke, for the moon was rising. Its rays fell through the one straight window of my room and made a white square on the brown-painted floor, and lighted up a queer little green rocking-chair with a rush bottom.

For one moment, I saw the chair standing empty; the next, a figure occupied it—the figure of a young girl. Her hair, which seemed to be golden, fell over her shoulders. Her back was toward me; but I saw that her figure was slight and graceful. Two little white hands were clasped, and she was rocking to and fro and moaning in a strange desolate way.

"This is odd," said I. "Someone has come into the room, not knowing I am here."

I coughed. The young person did not hear me. I spoke.

"Madam," said I, "I presume you are not aware that—in fact, that I am here."

"Yes. I came because I knew it."

She began to moan again. She stood beside the bed now. She stretched out her cold hands. It was time to do something. Whoever she might be, I saw that she was dangerous—a maniac, probably. I put my hand under the pillow, where my pistol lay. I seized it.

"Whoever you are," said I, "I presume you are a thief, playing at ghost. Leave the room. I give you three seconds to do it in. I count them. At the third count, I fire. One—two—three—"

As I said one, she retreated, pointing at me. As I counted two, she drew still farther off. As I cried three, she was gone.

I lighted the lamp and examined the room. The door was bolted as I had left it. I looked behind the boxes, barrels, and gowns. I examined the floor. There was no trap-door. Yet she was gone. If I had been a superstitious idiot, I should have said that I had seen a spirit. As it was, being a practical man, I at once argued with myself.

Tough fried ham and something called "Injun puddin'," whatever it may have been, had given me a nightmare—a nightmare in an unusual form, doubtless—a fair young girl in white, instead of Othello or a black dog. There were exceptions to every rule. I had had a white nightmare in place of a black one, that was all.

I extinguished the light. Again I fitted myself between the corn-cobs. Again I slept. Again I woke, to find a figure—the same figure—bending over me. It was moaning still, but this time it was doing more; two hands, as cold as ice, clutched my throat, pressing it hard.

"What are you about?" cried I, catching at my pistol again.

The cold hands dropped away. The girl retreated—vanished as before. I instituted a fresh search. I argued with myself anew.

"Nightmares always choke one," said I. "My white nightmare only did as others do."

But this time I found it harder to sleep, and, though I slept at last, I wakened very soon again, with a hand on my throat, and a voice moaning drearily:

"Let me rest in my grave; I do not want to kill him. Let me rest."

My pistol once more drove the white figure away. But a nightmare was a more serious thing than I had imagined. Had I ever been

fool enough to drink too much, I should have fancied myself the victim of delirium tremens. But a ghost! Bah! I gave no admittance to that thought for a moment. If the voice, the figure, the streaming hair, the touch of the little hands, cold as they were, reminded me of someone I had known long ago—this was owing to my disordered condition.

I sat up after that, and saw the sun rise for the first time in my existence.

I entered the dining-room; the good woman of the house, already eclipsed by the sun-bonnet, was talking to Barnard, who is—did I tell you? —an author, a writer of frightful stories.

She had found him out.

"To think it should be you," she said. "You don't look a bit like I expected! How I did look out for the next number, while 'Elgira, or Fortune's Victim,' was being published. I read it, every word; and, when she died of love, I cried. I didn't use to believe folks died of love—but—lem'me see—I guess it was fifteen years ago, I knew a case in actual life. Yes, sir, you could have made a story of it, no doubt. She died in this house, in the north garret—as pretty a creature as ever you saw. Her eyes were, oh! how brown, and such lovely golden hair! Her father brought her out here one summer. It was plain she was in a quick decline. But, pretty soon, I saw that there was more than sickness to deal with. The night she died, she told me. Yes, sir, it was a love-affair. He had jilted her because her father lost his money."

"But you should forget such a rascal; you should not go on loving a fellow like that," said I.

"I cannot forget," she said, "but I have grown to hate him. Sometimes I think I shall come back from the other world to trouble him. Ghosts are permitted to haunt their murderers, they say, and he has murdered me." She died that night. Poor child, she was very young:

"MILLY BASHWOOD,

Aged Eighteen."

"That is what is on her grave-stone in the burying-ground, if you'd like to look at it."

I don't know whether Mrs. Regan said anything more. Barnard says I fainted. I don't admit it; but, if I did, I vowed it was that abominable supper. A ghost—bah! But I wouldn't sleep in that north garret again for any fortune—practical man though I am.

A STORY 'O F ST. VALENTINE'S DAY.

BY JESSIE K. B. TAYLOR.



HE racket was unendurable. Mrs. Bliss wondered why the boys should be so noisy on this particular morning, when her head ached, and the bread wouldn't rise, and her husband's coat had been brought in bereft of every button. The great kitchen, into which the sun shone brightly, presented a scene of busy activity. It was Saturday, the house to be put in order, there were pies and cakes to bake, and—"Oh, those dreadful boys! They will drive me crazy! Why is it they can play nowhere but in the house, I wonder?" the mother exclaimed, when her aching head could endure no longer the shouts of unrestrained laughter. There were three boys of her own in the dining-room—Rollin, Dick, and Bert—roguish, bright-eyed, and rosy-cheeked, and, beside these, neighbor Town's two sons, who came every cold day to play with the Bliss boys.

Mrs. Town did not think much of boys' wants and rights. She did not choose to have them tracking through her orderly rooms; for, as she often remarked nervously: "They carry sure destruction with them to everything pretty or neat." So, at their house, there was no wide table with spreading leaves, no stout chairs, no drawing-paper with pencils lying conveniently near. There were no attractive games and not one book of travel.

At Farmer Bliss's, the boys were thought of and provided for; but, as in too many cases, the lads failed sometimes to appreciate the care and thoughtfulness; they were often much too noisy, and none of the things scattered so recklessly about had the effect of satisfying or quieting them.

Mrs. Bliss's youngest sister, Sue Miller, had come up from Richville a few weeks before, for a long visit. She sat, this morning, behind the stove by the south window, stoning raisins. She was always sweet-tempered and lovable, and Mrs. Bliss often said to her: "Nothing ever

frets you, Sue. If things do not move smoothly, you make them—that's all. I wish I knew the secret you possess—of not letting noise and the little perplexities worry you."

This morning, she appealed to her:

"Sue, nothing can help me half so much as to have that dreadful racket stilled. Can you do it?"

Sue set down the bowl of raisins and replied promptly:

"I will try."

She crossed the hall and looked in at the half-open door, thinking what she could do to insure a few minutes' quiet. As she stood there, she became conscious of a cessation of hostilities, and soon heard the boyish exclamation:

"Ahum! what shall we play next?"

Bert's pleasant voice replied:

"Oh, nothing. I'm tired of games. Let's make pictures."

"Naw—that's no fun!"

"We can play circus with Bonnie."

"Oh, yes!"

"No; the dog went with your father."

"Oh, dear!"

"Let's speak pieces," Dick suggested.

"I've forgot mine."

"Woodman, spare that tree—'" Dick began, vociferously.

"Pshaw!"

"No fun!"

"I don't like to do that!"

Amid these exclamations, Rollin interposed loudly:

"Say, boys—I'll tell you! Do you know what next Tuesday will be? I do: St. Valentine's Day."

"Well, what is that?" chimed in Ernest Town.

"I know!" Dick asserted. "It's nothing much—only a day when grown-up men write poetry and don't sign their names to it, and paste on some flowers and things, and send it to some girl they like the best, and then—"

"Oh, I know more about it than that!" said Rollin, contemptuously. "It isn't all love-sick poetry, and flowers and things. They have good ones to sell, with jolly pictures—of women with great long noses and ragged gowns and red hair, and men with hats all smashed in, with blue

and yellow neckties and wide mouths, and feet as big as Jim Clark's."

Shrieks of laughter greeted this vivid description, and Aunt Sue was just going to break in upon the mirth, when Rollin said very quietly and confidentially :

"Yes; and now keep still, every one of you, just a minute, and let me tell you what will be the jolliest fun: let us boys send some. Nobody can ever find out for sure who sent 'em, and it will be such a funny thing. Just think what a lark, to send one to Miss Drew! She's such a horrid old maid; her nose is peaked; and she don't like boys. She never gives one of us a taste of an apple, say nothing about pears; and she won't have a dog in the house—nothing but that old sneak of a tabby-cat, crosser than fury. Oh, I'd just like to make her think she had got a letter—you know, she is forever haunting the post-office—and then find out it was one of those valentines. They don't cost but a penny, Mark Gillett says; and it will be a dollar's-worth of fun to see her scowl, even if we don't get our eyes on her majestic form until the next morning. She'll be sour enough then to—"

"Yes, indeed!" acceded the four listeners.

"Heartless little wretches!" thought Aunt Sue.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said George Town: "I'm going to send one to John Markham. I almost hate him, he's such a sober old duffer. He's too pious or something ever to laugh. I'd like to wake him up. I saw a sheet, the other day, that would make him dance canary. There was a dried-up old bachelor, just like him, looking awfully sober, sitting all alone by a—"

At this instant, a new resolve came to Aunt Sue. Entering the room, she remarked quietly :

"Well, my boys, you seem to be having an interesting talk. Can't you tell me what it is about?"

The boys looked half embarrassed, half defiant. There was some scuffling of feet on the floor, considerable moving about, and sly glances between themselves; but no one vouchsafed to tell Aunt Sue the topic under discussion. One low voice, at length, announced apologetically that there wasn't anything they could do—that is, nothing that they wanted to do. It was too cold to slide, and—

This favored her plan; so, taking a chair close beside the table, she asked :

"What do you say to a story?"

Her nephews were acquainted with Aunt Sue's powers of story-telling, and expressed

themselves delighted with the prospect. The Town boys crowded eagerly about her, with the others; and, with one swift glance at their bright expectant faces, she began :

"This is to be just a short story of the days when your mother and I lived down in the village, with our parents. You know the house, boys—the brown one, where Mr. Rounds, the druggist, lives now. Yes, it was sometime before your mother was married, though we often saw Carlton Bliss," she added, smiling. "Well, just across the road from us, in the large white house with the woodbine running over it, then lived Doctor Drew, his wife, and daughter Mary."

"What! not our Mary Drew, the old maid, up here on the hill?"

"Yes, children," Aunt Sue replied. "Mary is but a few years older than I—"

"She looks forty years older," asserted Bert.

"And was," Aunt Sue continued, "at that time, a very pretty-looking girl."

"Humph!" from the boys, in accents of unbelief.

Their entertainer frowned, and the boys subsided.

"One spring, the fever broke out in the village. Patients were numerous and increasing alarmingly; doctors and nurses were few; and, one bright morning, we saw Mary Drew come out of the house and go quickly down the street. She went through the village and over to the improvised hospital, where her father was in charge. She told them there she was ready for her work. In spite of the tears and entreaties of her friends, she staid in the hospital as long as she was needed, and then attended several cases in the village. When your mother was seized with the dreadful fever, she called constantly for Mary until she came, and then would let no other hands do for her. She said Mary's step and touch were the lightest, her voice the lowest and sweetest. After the long weeks of watching by my sister, she at last took the fever, and came very near dying.

"She was ill for months; and, when she recovered, she found her father dead and the dear homestead owned by strangers. She was still very weak; but, with a steady purpose, she went to her work again. She took what remained of the property and bought the little place on the hill. As long as her mother lived, she made a comfortable and pleasant home for her. After her death, Mary worked on. She has never been well since her terrible sickness. And this, perhaps, is why she looks so old.

It also makes her very nervous and irritable. The family had suffered great injustice before this, and the memory of that renders her distrustful, even of her friends. She has to depend on the products of her orchard and garden for a living; and that is a good reason, I think, for her never giving the children treats of fruit. She is fearful of coming to sadder want, and is too proud to accept assistance, even after doing all she has for others, that they might live and be prosperous."

Aunt Sue was rewarded by sighs of sympathy and loud assurances of the deepest pity and of gratitude to Miss Drew. Three of the lads were thinking soberly: What if she hadn't gone to nurse their mother? This made them very quiet. At length, the silence was broken by slow-voiced Ernest, suggesting:

"Maybe, Miss Miller, if Mary Drew had not gone to nursing and got sick herself, she would be now almost as sweet and pretty and young as you are."

This also furnished food for reflection, so Aunt Sue accepted the compliment in silence. Soon, she spoke again:

"On another street, up toward the seminary, lived a widow lady and her son. Her name was Mrs. Markham, and her son's name was John."

There followed sundry nudges, with confident nods of the head, and one or two looks which might be deemed guilty; but all these, the sweet-faced story-teller thought it wise not to notice.

"He was a very pleasant young man," she went on, "and was then about twenty years old. He was a favorite everywhere. No party was thought to be complete without him. There was no laugh so hearty or musical as his. He never overlooked us children, but had a word and smile for everyone. He worked hard, for his mother was very poor, and he was her only support. A little way from the village lived a sweet-faced golden-haired girl, Katie Wilson. Somehow John Markham came to find the way out to the pleasant farm-house quite often. He confided to his mother that there surely were

never such fresh breezes and green grass elsewhere, and never such fruits and flowers. The baskets of these he brought to her were very nice indeed. The dear old lady ate the fruit and smelled the flowers with appearance of the deepest enjoyment, while John looked triumphantly on. The mother wondered, sometimes, if it were not more the sweet face and welcoming smile that turned his steps toward the farm; but, like a wise woman, she said nothing. During the winter, a brother of hers, whom she had

supposed dead for many years, died suddenly in California, and left his large property to his only sister, if still living—and, if she were dead, to her children. The lawyers found out Mrs. Markham and her son by advertising, and wrote to John, urging him to come and attend to matters. The mother thought it best that he should go, so he started very soon for California, intending to sell everything there as soon as possible, and be at liberty to return to his mother and friends. He found things in such shape that it was impossible for him to arrange them until many months had passed. He was obliged to travel much between the large cities, and so it was seldom that letters from home reached him. It was a long busy year.

"He was very happy when he could at last turn his face homeward. He brought with him enough to insure for his mother and himself a care-free future. He had the highest hopes, and sweet anticipations kept him company through the long journey; but he reached home to find his little Katie dead—the sweetest blossom the dear old farm had ever held, hidden away forever from earth's seeing and knowing, under its drifting snow. John's best hopes and highest ambitions were laid in that grave, and there has been no summer for him since. He has never found anyone he can love so well as he did dear little Katie, so he is still unmarried. Now, children, when the boys laugh and jeer at him, and dub him 'old bach,' don't you suppose it makes his sensitive sorrowful heart ache? Tell me, do you think it is right to hurt his feelings by calling names or screaming after him?"

There were loud cries of "No!" "No, of course not!" "It's mean!" "I wouldn't!" "I did, but I wouldn't if I'd only known!" "We won't do it again, auntie; will we, boys?" and there was a united chorus of "No!" She left them then and went back to the kitchen.

Mrs. Bliss exclaimed: "Why, Sue, what have you done with the children? Have you spirited them away?"

"No, indeed," her sister replied, laughing; "they are there yet in veritable flesh and blood, but sobered down some by some 'medicated' stories. I think it will do them good," she added, and beside, she thought: "I am sure now that they will not hurt poor Mary Drew's feelings, or John's, poor sorrowful boy!" The "boy" was nearly forty, but it did not matter.

None knew sweet Sue Miller's secret, kept as it was, so quietly and bravely. She had learned years before to know and love great-hearted

John Markham. But fate had made his life not hers to comfort and bless—hers only to pray for and remember.

There was a long earnest conversation in the dining-room until dinner-time, when the five boys filed out, looking sober, but very wise withal. Things went on quietly until Monday evening, when the Town boys came over, bringing very carefully a large box. There was much loud whispering outside the door, and a few suppressed giggles. Finally, Rollin came close to Aunt Sue's side and asked her to come into the other room, "just a minute."

"We want you to help us a little," he explained.

She consented, and led the way. The box was quickly opened, and inside were great clusters of blossoms and fresh green leaves.

"Why, children, what is this?" she asked, and then the boys' plan came out.

"Why, you see, to-morrow is St. Valentine's Day, and we thought it would be a lar— be nice, I mean, to send some flowers to Miss Drew, and just a little bunch to John Markham; for we feel sorry for them both—don't we, boys? We can't send many, you see, for Auntie Marsh gave us every flower there was on her plants, and we knew you had only a few."

The patient listener answered that it would not be the number of the bright blossoms that would be thought of, she was sure, in either case, but the loving thought that prompted the gift.

The box for Miss Drew was soon arranged to the boys' satisfaction. The blossoms and leaves were laid on a bed of soft green moss, and, when the boys' card was laid carefully beside them, it looked—a gift sweet and fair enough to cheer the loneliest heart. The card bore in Aunt Sue's writing the few words:

"**MISS DREW:**

With best wishes of boys
Who live not far away,
These flowers come to you
On St. Valentine's Day."

Somehow it took longer to arrange the other box to Aunt Sue's liking. There were a few half-open buds on the rose-bush by the window, and these were added, together with moss and some of the clinging vines from the basket swinging near. At last, it was completed—the sweet messenger of love and peace. For this box, the card held these words, in boyish hand-writing:

"**MR. JOHN MARKHAM:**

"These flowers are from some boys who send with them their best wishes, and hope you will

forgive all the things they have done to vex you, and hope, too, that you may have a great many happy St. Valentine's Days."

This was fully approved by the interested assistant, and soon both boxes were set away in the cellar until morning. Then there was another solemn meeting, and fleet-footed Dick was chosen to carry the boxes. He ran up the hill to Miss Drew's, rang the door-bell without mercy, and, when he heard slow steps inside, laid the box quickly on the wide step, and flew away. He was out of sight in an instant, and Miss Drew saw only the box awaiting her. This she took up wonderingly, went in, and closed the door. The first wood-team that went to town in the morning had aboard the same happy Dick, who wore a most business-like air and held something very carefully in his cold little hands. He rang the bell at John Markham's; but, to his astonishment, that gentleman was just coming out, and, before poor Dick could even think of flight, the two surprised people met in the small porch. Dick reached out the box nervously, and said in a trembling voice:

"This is St. Valentine's Day; did you know it? This is for you; but, you see, we—us boys, you know—didn't mean you should know. I meant to run away. I hope it's pleasant! My father must be waiting for me! Ah, what will Aunt Sue say?"

The child paused to get breath, and, seeing John's wondering and rather amused look, went on desperately:

"We don't feel one bit as we used, we boys. and, oh! dear, I'm sorry it wasn't a surprise. Good-morning," and Dick scampered away, conscious that he had not made this visit a complete success.

John went back into the house with his mysterious box. Very soon he understood it all—or thought that he did—but I am not quite sure that he interpreted its inner meaning.

That afternoon, Mary Drew ran down to Mr. Bliss's for an hour's chat. There was a little glance of understanding between her and Sue, as she told of the sweet surprise and pleasure the unexpected remembrance had given her.

"Why, do you know," she said, with tears in her voice, "it makes the day beautiful to me. Such a little thing; but I do wish the dear children could understand how much comfort their little kindness has been."

As she went out of the gate, the boys were just coming in, dragging their sleds. They were shy and silent, but the brave woman would not let them pass until she had thanked them in a few sincere and very pleasant words.

They were happy, indeed, as they flocked indoors.

A few evenings later, John Markham drove out, and passed a pleasant hour at the Blisses' fireside. During his call, he thanked the boys quietly but earnestly for their remembrance, speaking in particular of the kind-heartedness that prompted the sweet gift.

Rollin could not let this pass so, and burst out impulsively :

"But it wasn't all our goodness. Indeed, it wasn't! We have laughed at you for being so still and sober, and—and—I don't know what we would have done if it hadn't been for Aunt Sue! She—she—told us stories; there! and that's what made us better boys, and she put in the rose-buds and—"

Rollin's father came to the rescue with some casual remarks to John. He, poor fellow, knew so little what to say to the boyish outbreak. Sue said nothing. There was nothing to say. She could only blush and lower her eyes. It

happened that John came several times after this, and, strangely enough, he failed even to inquire for the youngsters. He must have known they were in the house, for only in very rare instances did they fail to make this fact known. John must have been absent-minded. He was fast finding a brightness in Sue Miller's eyes that he imagined necessary to his path. Her welcome was the sweetest music he had heard since the golden season before the great blight. Her quiet sympathy comforted him more than volumes from other tongues could do, and so it came about that in the early summer these two left all the cares, the shadowings, and the dimmed visions of the past behind them for aye, and, hand in hand, turned their faces hopefully forward.

The boys held many a conference as to how it could all have happened so nicely. Dick stoutly declaring in every word-battle that he knew it was because he did not run away that morning.



A WINTER DANCE.

BY J. B. SKIDMORE.

Down from the soft gray silence
Of the brooding clouds above,
Came a messenger swift and silent
As the first pure thought of love.

A white-robed frolicsome herald,
The first of a merry band,
Who would change in a magical moment
This earth into fairyland.

And lo, as I watched the stranger,
So daintily silvery fair,

His playmates, merrily dancing,
Came whirling through the air.

And wherever they fell in their frolic,
On tree-tops or frozen fields,
A strange white beauty lingered
Like the glimmer of fairy shields.

All through the night did these gay little sprites
Dance in bewildering whirr,
And the morning found, 'neath their twinkling feet,
A ball-room of silver and pearl.

LINES.

BY MRS. PIDSLEY.

LORD, Thou art good and gracious,
Thy care is over all;
Our very hairs are numbered—
Thou seest the sparrow fall.

Thou sendest sun and showers—
All blessed gifts are Thine;

Thou crownest earth with gladness,
For Thou art love divine.

We know Thy care aboundeth,
We feel it every day,
And bless the hand that guides us
When clouds obscure the way.